AMAZING RACE: ENHANCING SOFT SKILLS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING VIA COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AMONG PRE-DIPLOMA STUDENTS AT KEDAH

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Abstract

Universities in Malaysia are aggressively preparing their students to face the challenges of the Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0) which requires them to master the soft skills and English language. Owing to the pressure and demands of the workforce, University Technology of MARA has introduced the Week Without Wall (WWW) as an approach to enrich students learning experience through an alternative method of teaching and learning delivery. Therefore, the researchers employ a new and innovative English language teaching and learning method - The Amazing Race. The objective of this study was the identification of the skills developed and applied by students during the outdoor adventure program. There were 25 full-time students enrolled in Pre-Diploma programme at UiTM Kedah Branch in northern Malaysia, and they had participated in this innovative teaching and learning opportunity, which incorporated the necessary language skills and also soft skills outcomes. For the study, these students aged 18 years, voluntarily completed three open-ended questions regarding the skills they applied and developed during the event participation. Qualitative techniques were utilised to analyse the data inductively and rendered 121 meaning units, grouped into 11 categories. Students identified more soft skills than language learning skills. Therefore, tertiary institutions could employ this outdoor innovative teaching and learning method to develop students' soft skills and acquire English in the process.

Keywords: Amazing Race, Cooperative Learning, ESL students, Language learning, SoftSkills.

Introduction

In the Malaysia Education 4.0 framework, challenges of the fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) are addressed about the Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education 2015-2025. It is imperative that students are equipped with ICT and collaborative skills and to be interested in lifelong learning notion. The current expectation that many of us have for students is that they need to have critical and creative thinking plus have an excellent communicative skill. Upon attaining this expectation, various studies (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Laurel, 2000, Bado, & Franklin, 2014) suggested that in producing balanced critical, creative and excellent students, depends on the structure of an in-class and outside-classroom activity such as Cooperative learning, Inferential Learning and Game-based

Learning. MARA University of Technology, Malaysia took an extra effort by introducing Week Without Wall (WWW). Week Without Wall (WWW) is an approach introduced by the university in supporting the Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education 2015-2025, IR 4.0, via enriching students learning experience through an alternative method of teaching and learning delivery. WWW has proven to be a practical approach in assisting the student in developing their five main principles of successful cooperative learning situations, namely positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability and personal responsibility, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).
The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, a discussion on the problem statement is undertaken and followed by the literature review. Next, the research method is delineated and followed by the results and discussion on findings. The final section of the paper provides the conclusion, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Problem Statement
University of Technology MARA, Kedah Branch is located at a nearby small town called Semeling which is situated at the northern state of Malaysia - Kedah. It offers pre-diploma, diploma and degree programmes emphasizing on the study of social sciences. Currently, it has 6,000 students from all over Malaysia, and it only accepts the Bumiputera (Native) students who are mainly Malays students. In this study, the respondents were from remote rural areas such as Yan, Sik, Jeniang, Guar, Baling, Tanjong Dawai and to name a few. These areas are mainly locals who are involved with fishery, rubber tapping, paddy planting, and other odd jobs. In short, they are from the unfortunate family with low-income background, and some families depend on the Welfare Department for a monthly allowance.

These students mostly aged 18 years old were offered to further study in Pre-Diploma programme. It is a unique programme introduced by the university to cater for needy students with a minimum academic qualification. In that programme, they are taught introductory subjects on Business, Accounting, Mathematics and of course, English language. English for Pre-Diploma (ELC030) is designed to improve the language ability of pre-diploma students whose proficiency is at the elementary level. It focuses on the four language components which are reading, writing, listening, speaking, and the teaching of grammar is integrated into the four language components. Students are indirectly taught to respond verbally and appropriately in a social context as well as responding to audio texts in written form. Lecturers, on the other hand, are encouraged to use authentic situations to teach language functions, and all tasks are needed to be interactive, varied and challenging. Emphasis is placed on developing students' vocabularies, integrating grammar as well as improving their communicative ability and fluency. However, these students struggle in understanding and using the English language. They were often seen as a lack of motivation, shy, passive, lack of participation, and reluctant learners in the classroom.
To tackle shyness, readiness, and anxiety, the competitiveness generated through the relaxed environment is deemed to be motivating. As

posited by Chen (2005), games allow communicative competence as anxiety is reduced, and speech fluency is enhanced. Hence, both productive and receptive skills using the English language are utilized in a meaningful context. Furthermore, interaction among group members is imperative in a game-oriented context. The competitive nature not only can facilitate implicit learning of the target language and inhibit shyness during task accomplishment, but it can also boost their confidence. Therefore, in negotiating to mean using the English language, social skills and interpersonal skills are enhanced through the series of tasks. As such, the research undertaken is timely and warranted. Thus, this paper addresses three (3) primary research objectives as follows:

1. To determine whether Amazing Race can enhance soft skills, and
2. To determine whether Amazing Race can enhance language learning,

Literature Review

Malaysia is taking proactive steps to transform its higher education system to cater to IR 4.0. Malaysian Government believe that, if universities in Malaysia are not taking any drastic measures, the students will fail to reach their potential skills and will not be employed in the future. Current statistics show that the number of unemployed graduates in Malaysia is worrying. Though there are many possible causes for this phenomena, it is believed that present employers look upon fresh graduates as liabilities who need to be provided with extra training before they can function adequately in their job. Hence, local universities and colleges are forced to be prepared to adapt and change their curriculum and delivery so that graduates can fill in jobs which are yet to emerge. Though education is fundamental in preparing present and future generations' success, it is vital for students to be equipped with education that develops their human potential rather than pits it against machines and technology alone (Brown Martin, 2018). An education system designed for an industrial economy that is now being automated requires transformation, from a system based on facts and procedures to one that actively applies that knowledge to collaborative problem-solving. Consequently, three key areas were identified by several researchers in countenancing us to surpass machines when it comes to future job creation:

1. **Creative Endeavours**
   This area will incorporate everything from scientific discovery to creative writing and entrepreneurship
2. **Social Interaction**
   Social-emotional intelligence is unique to the only human. Where else, robots and machinery are prone to follow procedure, process and tactical technic.

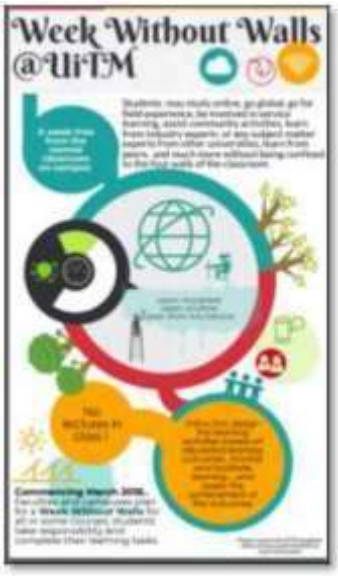
3. **Physical Dexterity and Mobility**
   Humans are born with extraordinary long term agility and physical dexterity

MARA University of Technology (UiTM): Week Without Walls

Week Without Wall (WWW) is an approach introduced by the university in supporting Malaysia Education Blueprint for Higher Education 2015-2025 and IR 4.0 by enriching students learning experience through an alternative method of teaching and learning delivery.
WWW was introduced in March 2018, where the main objective of this week is on centred teaching-without the lecturer. It is a week free from the regular classroom on campus and students are allowed to go for study online, go global or go for field experience. WWW must be in a situation where students will be involved in either service learning, assist community activities, learn from industry experts or any subject matter experts from other universities, learn from peers, as long as it's not being confined to the four walls of the classroom. Instructors design the learning activities based on stipulated learning outcomes, monitor and facilitate learning and assess the achievement of the outcomes. WWW is more of student-centred coaching by allowing students to explore subjects' taught, through given individual or group tasks or activities that are flexible and this approach exceed the normal in classroom and lecture hall discourses. Among the examples of WWW activities are:

a) Online learning through WEB 2.0,
b) Learning based on Peer Learning including *Peer Tutoring*
c) In community learning like *Service Learning*
d) Research-based learning or *Field Experience*
e) Learning which involves experts, lecturers and another group of university students
f) Global learning

Figure 1: Weeks without Wall



MARA University Technology Malaysia, have successfully applied both the theory of informal and incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins) and Cooperative Learning (Stephen Kagan) in this WWW program.

Soft Skills

In the university, soft skills are essential as they can amplify the students' employability and worth. Roos, Van Den Berg, Lennox, and Els (2016) reported that for employees to sustain long term job success, 75% is dependent on soft skills such as excellent people skills. Students with "people skills" are highly demanded individuals who have excellent leadership, communication, time management, problem-solving and teamwork. They display a collection of personal, positive qualities and talents that heighten interactions, job performance, and significance to the market. Therefore, the researchers introduce the Amazing Race activities, and the respondents must profoundly demonstrate their soft skills for 10 hours. Not only must the respondents determine how they interact with others, they need to apply critical and structured thinking, problem-solving skills, creativity, teamwork competence, negotiating skills, self-management, time management, conflict management, cultural attentiveness, shared knowledge, responsibility, etiquette and good manners, courtesy, self-esteem, amiability, reliability, empathy, and workethic.

Informal and Accidental Learning

The origins of informal and incidental learning is linked to many other educational concepts, such as learning "en passant" (Reischmann, 1986), the distinctions several others have made between formal, informal, and nonformal learning (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974; Mocker and Spear, 1982; Jarvis, 1987), social modeling (Bandura, 1986), experiential learning (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1993; Kolb, 1984), self-directed learning (Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1950), action learning as a variant of experiential learning (Revans,

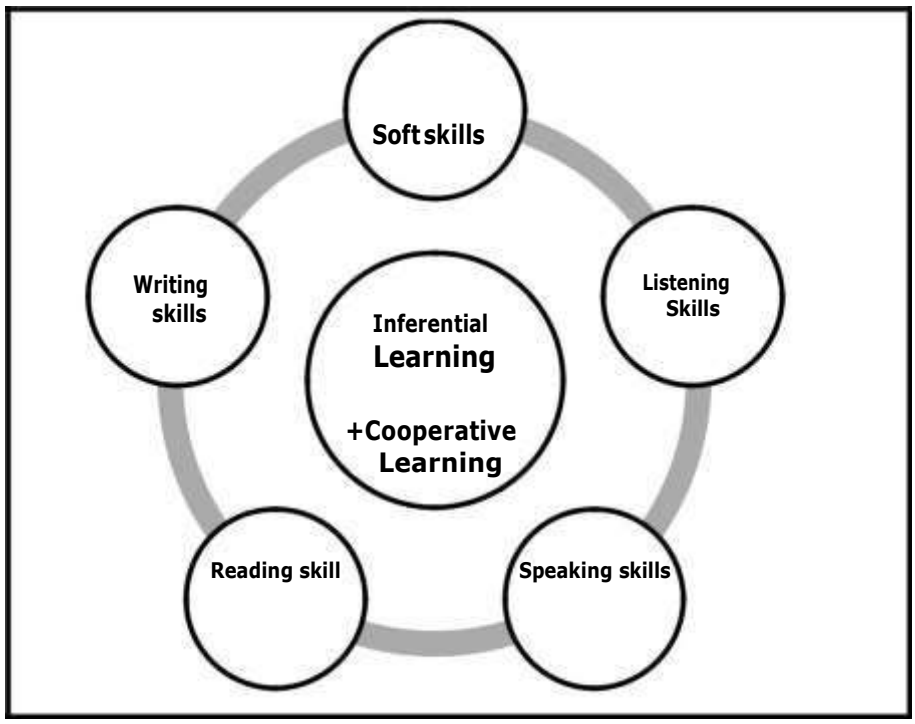
1982), action science (Argyris and Schön, 1978) and reflection in action (Schön, 1983), critical reflection and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), tacit knowing (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995;), situated cognition (Lave and Wenger, 1991), and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). These concepts are related to informal and incidental learning, but they are not synonymous with the terms in the way that we use them here. Hence Informal and Incidental learning is defined as: "a by-product of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing of organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning". It implies implicit learning occurs without the employees and students' awareness. Students face challenges when making new connections or when learning in new ways. Therefore, the theory of incidental learning can be utilised as it provides a framework to understand these soft skills students learn through the challenges they face. The tacit learning framework also provides students with the opportunity to learn new skills as well as opportunities in different contexts to process experiences into knowledge.

Cooperative Learning

This theory was introduced by Stephen Kagan. Cooperative learning can be defined as students working together in a group, small enough that everyone can participate in a common task that has been assigned. Moreover, students are expected to carry out their task without direct and immediate supervision of the teacher. The study of cooperative learning should not be confused with small groups that teachers often compose for intensive, direct instruction—for example, reading groups (Cohen, Brody, & Sapon-Shevin, 1994, p. 3). Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2013). Cooperative learning (CL) refers to students working in teams on an assignment or project under conditions in which specific criteria are satisfied, including that the team members be held individually accountable for the complete content of the assignment or project (Felder & Brent, 2007). Cooperative learning focusses on five main principles, 1) Positive interdependence, where each student in the same group has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort, and all team members rely on one another to achieve the goal. 2) Individual accountability, all team members/students in the group must be accountable for contributing their share of the work and mastering all of the material to be learned for the group's success. 3) Face-to-face positive interaction, although some of the group work may be parcelled out and done individually, some must be done interactively, with group members providing one another with feedback, challenging reasoning and conclusions, and perhaps most importantly, teaching, helping, supporting, applauding and encouraging one another in order to reach the group's goals. 4) Appropriate use of social, interpersonal, collaborative and small- group skills. Students are encouraged and helped to develop and practice trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills. 5) Group processing. Team members set group goals,

describe what member actions are helpful or not, periodically assess what they are doing well as a team, and identify changes they will make to function more effectively in the future (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991; Kagan, 1994).

Figure 2: ConceptualFramework



Methodology

Sample

Data was collected through a questionnaire survey distributed to 25 students who participated in this study at the end of the Amazing Race activity. The students who participated in this study are in semester one of their programmes. A total of 25 responses were received yielding a response rate of 100 per cent. All responses were taken for data analysis. Seventy-two per cent of the respondents are Female (18 responses) and the balance, 28 per cent are Male (7 responses). Majority of the respondents are 18 years old.

Amazing Race set-up

The lecturer formed five groups of no more than five team members randomly. All teams started the race from the same location on campus – the academic courtyard at 9.30 a.m. After the rules and procedures were explained, the teams received their first task, then moved on to the next until they finished all twelve tasks by 6.00 p.m. Teams had to complete twelve stations of activities which began from the campus and ended at Amanjaya Mall (a local Shopping Mall in the town of Sungai Petani). The format resembles the television Amazing Race Program, where teams received clues as to where the next station would be. Module-specific questions were written in the English language, and most checkpoints were monitored by three lecturers. Some instructions required teams to depend on their mobile phone. They were welcomed to ask questions to their lecturers via Whatsapps using the English language. Teams had to walk or run to their next station and teams arriving first would receive the questions or physical task

First, giving them an advantage of completing first and advancing to the next station. Below is the summary of the task:

Figure 3: Summary of Amazing Race Checkpoints

No. Task	Task	Location
1	Flag-off task: Listen to a music video, sing to the chorus in a group & record the singing	Courtyard, UiTM Kedah / 9.30 a.m.
2	Pit stop 1: Show the video, get the next clue & call a Grab car	Campus main entrance
3	Pit stop 1: Make a request & record a video	Ulam Pegaga Restaurant
4	Clue card 1: Identify local landmarks	Semeling town
5	Extra task: Read a passage on Mangrove Forest and answer reference words	Mangrove Semeling Jetty
6	Clue card 2: Identify local landmarks	Bandar Laguna Merbok
7	Pit stop 3: Play bowling, and answer questions & claim prize	U-Bowl, Amanjaya Mall
8	Pit stop 4: Identify books / Memory jog at MPH	MPH Bookstore
9	Pit stop 5: Answer true or false questions	First to the third floor
10	Clue Card 3: Identify items in the mall & claim prize	C-mart, Watson, others
11	E-poster: Discuss, prepare a poster & make a presentation based on programme	Concourse, first floor
12	Pit stop 6: Arrive campus safely & return all clues.	UiTM Kedah / 6 p.m. – 10 p.m.

Each pitstop task is created to create a fun communication and learning activity atmosphere. Students are enforced to competing with one another and most importantly enjoying doing it in a fun and friendly manner. Below is the rationale of each given task:

Figure 4: Rationale & Skills for Amazing Race Checkpoints

Task	Rationale	Skills
Flag off task **Listen to music video and sing.**	To build rapport with the team members that were randomly assigned	Listening Speaking
Pit Stop 1 **Show the video, get the next clue &** **call a Grabcar**	To build confidence in speaking	Listening Speaking
Pit stop 1: **Make a request & record a video**	To build confidence in speaking	Listening Speaking
Clue card 1: **Identify local landmarks**	To make connections with locations and landmarks and enhance analytical skills	Listening Speaking
Additional task: **Read a passage on Mangrove Forest** **and answer reference words**	To practise students' understanding on reference words	Reading Listening Speaking
Clue card 2: **Identify local landmarks**	To make connections with locations and landmarks and enhance analytical skills	Listening Speaking
Pit stop 3: **Play bowling, and answer questions &** **claim prize**	To practice social skills and build rapport with group members	Listening Speaking
Pit stop 4: **Memory jog at MPH / Identify book**	To rely on memory and report to group members	Reading Listening Speaking
Pit stop 5:	To practise comprehension and make	Reading

True or falsequestions	logical connections	Listening

		Speaking
Clue Card 3: **Identify items in the mall & claim prize**	To enhance analytical skills, practise social skills and establish self-confidence	Reading Listening Speaking
E-poster: **Discuss, prepare a poster & make a presentation based on programme**	To make conclusions and build confidence in speaking,	Reading Writing Listening Speaking
Pit stop 6: **arrive campus safely & return all clues.**	To practise social skills and establish self-confidence	Listening Speaking

Data Analysis and Findings

The questionnaire survey was divided into two sections: 1) Section A and 2) Section B. Section A enquire brief demographic information of the respondents such as gender and age. Meanwhile Section B consist of 17 items that used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree to seek respondents' opinion on the Amazing Race activities conducted. The first 11 items of the question in section B has been classified into four skills themes such as management, cognitive, social, and knowledge. Another six items of question relate to respondents' opinion on the overall conduct of the activities such as the content of the activities, the suitability of the venue chosen, a continuation of the program in the future and recommending the activities to other friends. The focus of this paper is to determine whether the Amazing Race can enhance soft skills and language learning. As such only items related to direct communication that is to test the soft skills have been extracted for analysis. Descriptive analysis has been undertaken using Microsoft Excel.

The results of the analysis are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Results on Amazing Race

		n (%)				
NO	**ITEM**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
		Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
1	I believe the **FLAG OFF TASK: GLAD YOU CAME** activity increase my communication and	-	-	2 (8)	6 (24)	17 (68)

	listening skills. (Speaking & Listening).					
2	I believe the **Pit stop 1: Requesting Nasi Goreng Kampong & clue card (video)** activity increase my communication and listening skills. (Speaking).	-	-	2 (8)	6 (24)	17 (68)
3	I believe **Pit Stop 4: True or False** activity increases my communication skills in English (Speaking & Vocabulary & Reading).	-	-	1 (4)	8 (32)	16 (64)
4	I believe that **the Poster Presentation: Reflection activity** increases my communication skills in English (Speaking).	-	-	1 (4)	5 (20)	19 (76)
5	I believe **Pit Stop 6: UiTM** activity increases my communication in English (Speaking).	-	-	1 (4)	14 (56)	10 (40)

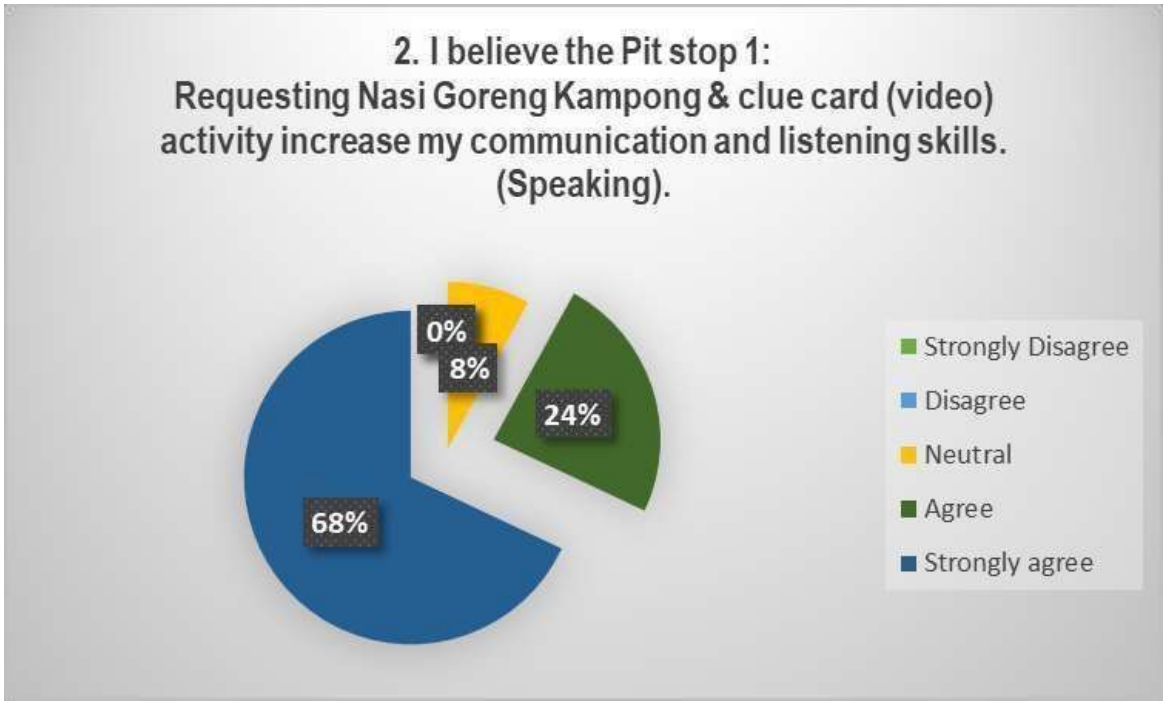


Chart Descriptive Results on Amazing Race 1: Increasing Communication and Listening Skill

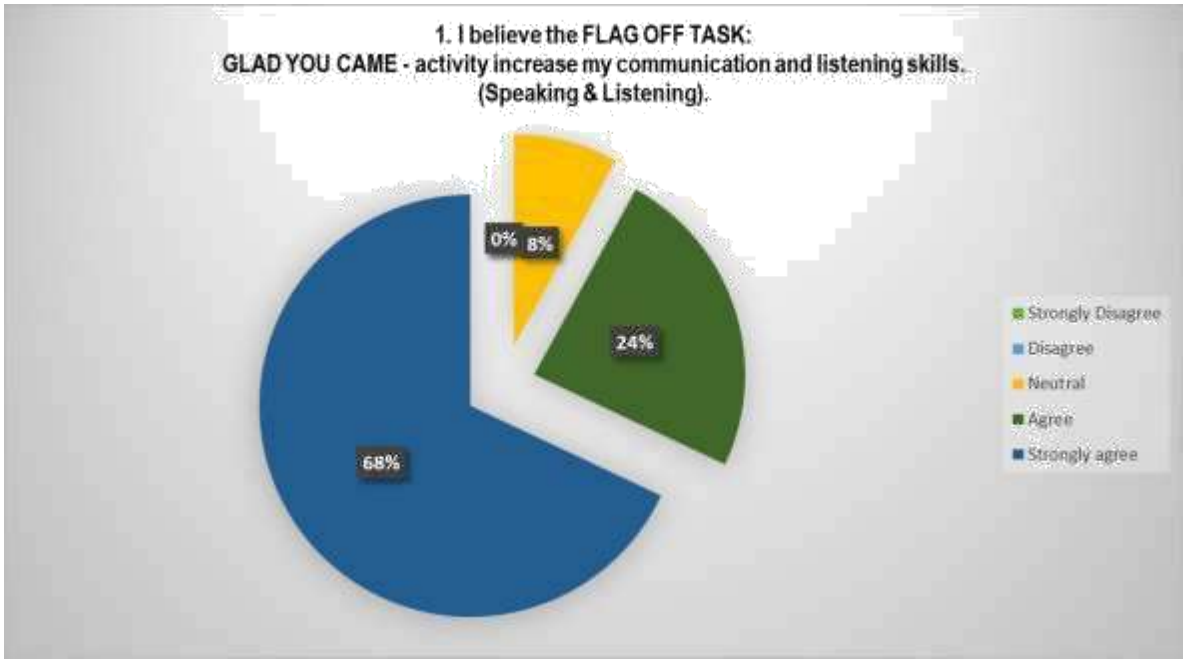


Chart Descriptive Results on Amazing Race 2: Increasing Communication and Listening Skill

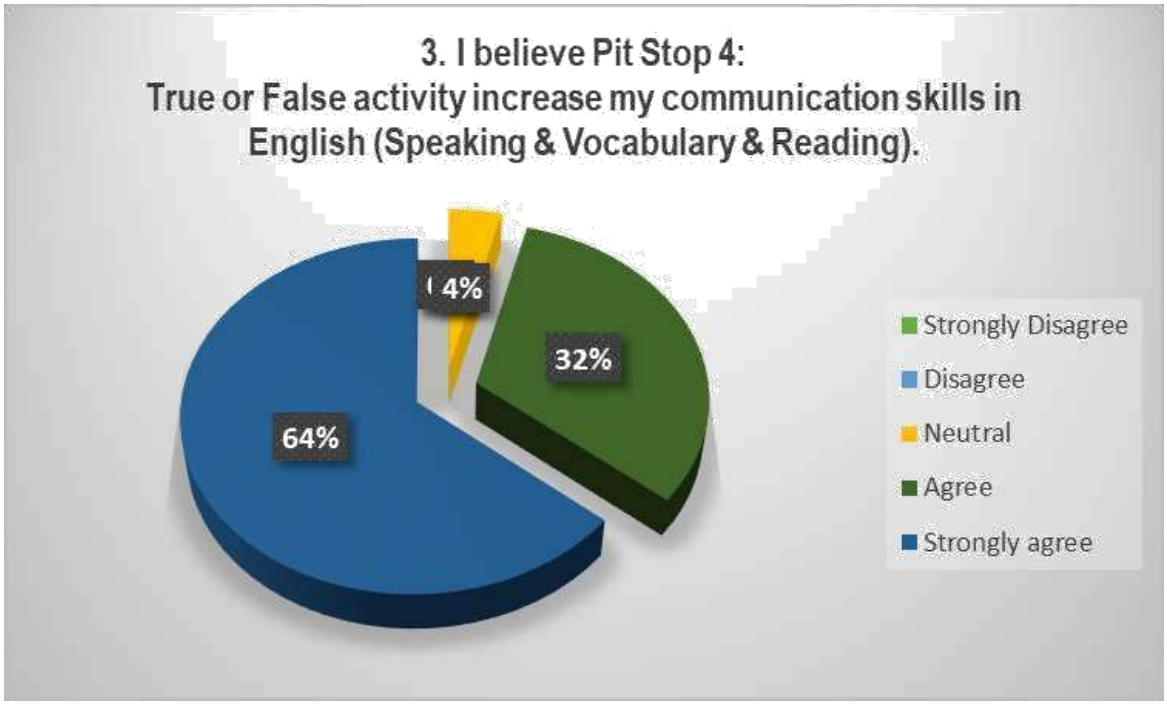


Chart Descriptive Results on Amazing Race 3: Increasing Communication and Listening Skill

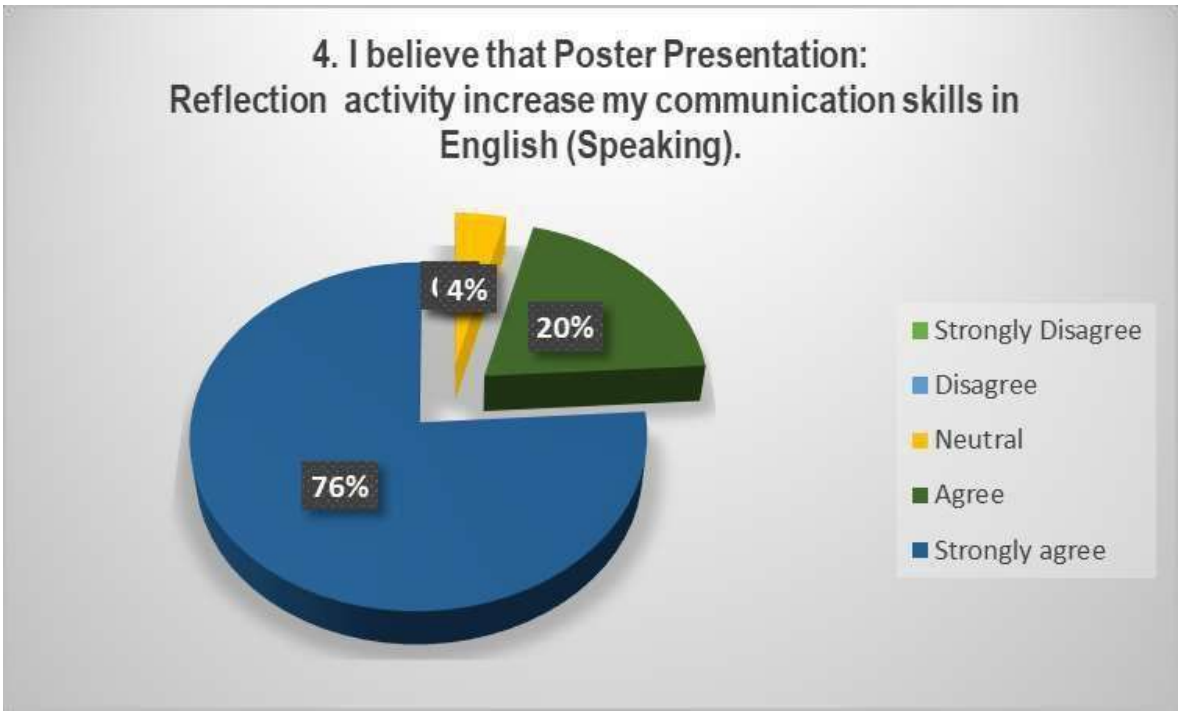


Chart Descriptive Results on Amazing Race 4: Increasing Communication and Speaking Skill

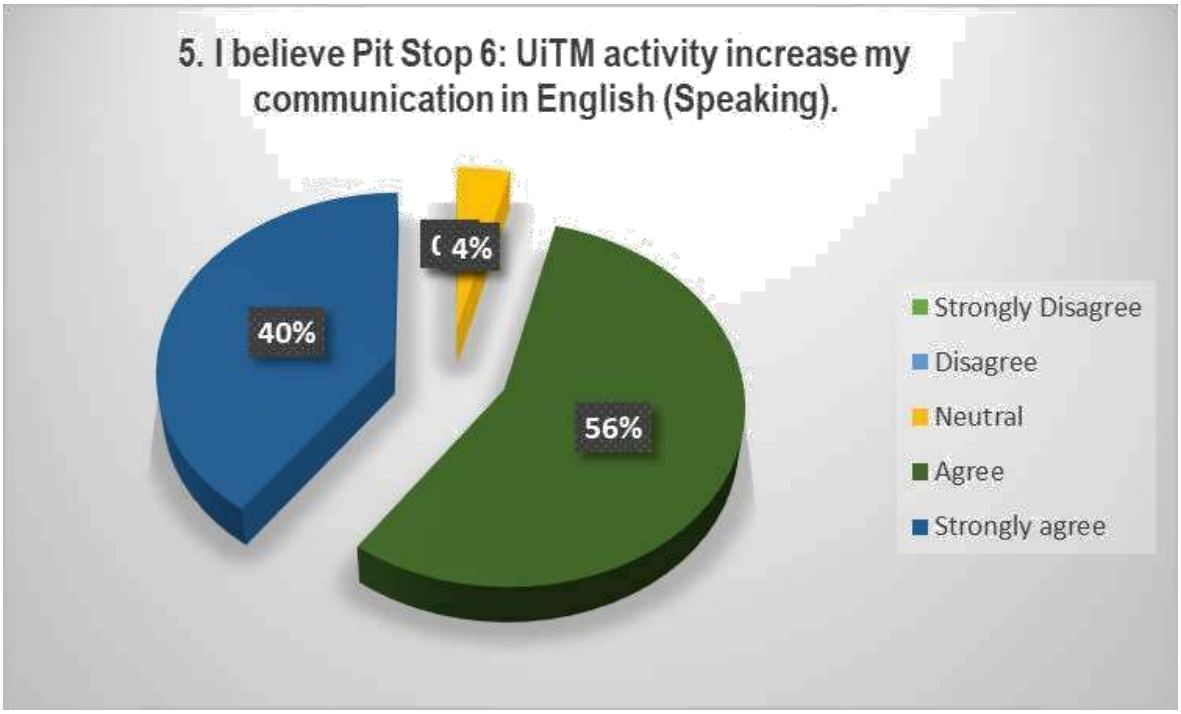


Chart Descriptive Results on Amazing Race 5: Increasing Communication in English

Majority of the respondents 92 per cent (agree and strongly agree) believe that Flag Off Task: Glad You Came activity has increased their communication and listening skills. Similarly, 92 per cent of the respondents (agree and strongly agree) reported that Pit Stop 1 activity that is requesting 'Nasi Goreng Kampong' and to video record the activity had increased their speaking skills. Ninety-six per cent of the respondents (agree and strongly agree) reported that Pit Stop 4 activity that is True False had increased their speaking, vocabulary and reading skills. Ninety-six per cent of the respondents (agree and strongly agree) reported that Poster presentation activity had increased their speaking skills. Ninety-six per cent of the respondents (agree and strongly agree) believe that Pit Stop 6: UiTM has increased their vocabulary skill. In summary, the results indicate that Amazing Race has enhanced the students' soft skills and language learning. Thus, supporting the research objective one and two of this study.

The questionnaire also seeks the overall comment from the respondents on this Amazing Race. The summary of the overall comments given by the students on they believe how this Amazing Race Activity has affected them is depicted in Table 3. Majority of the respondents (96 per cent) believe that the content of the program is suitable with their level of English. Ninety-six per cent of the respondents agreed that Amazing Race should continue in the future.

Ninety-two per cent of the respondents would recommend this program to their friends, and 96 per cent of the respondents believe that this program has achieved its objective successfully. With a high percentage reported on this overall comments, it indicates that Amazing Race can motivate reluctant ESL language learner to learn English in a fun and indirect manner. Thus, the findings supported research objective three of this study.

Table 3: Overall Comments on Amazing Race

		n (%)				
NO	**ITEM**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
		Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
1	I believe my objective has achieved success in Amazing Race.	-	-	1 (4)	15 (60)	9 (36)
2	I believe that the location of this program is suitable. UiTM – PEKAN SEMELING-TITI SEMELING-BANDAR LAGUNA MERBOK-AMANJAYA MALL	-	-	1 (4)	6 (24)	18 (72)
3	I believe that the content of this program suits my level of English.	-	-	1 (4)	14 (56)	10 (40)

4	I believe that this type of program should be continued.	-	-	1 (4)	3 (12)	21 (84)
5	I recommend my friend to participate in this program to increase their communication skills in English.	-	-	2 (8)	3 (12)	20 (80)

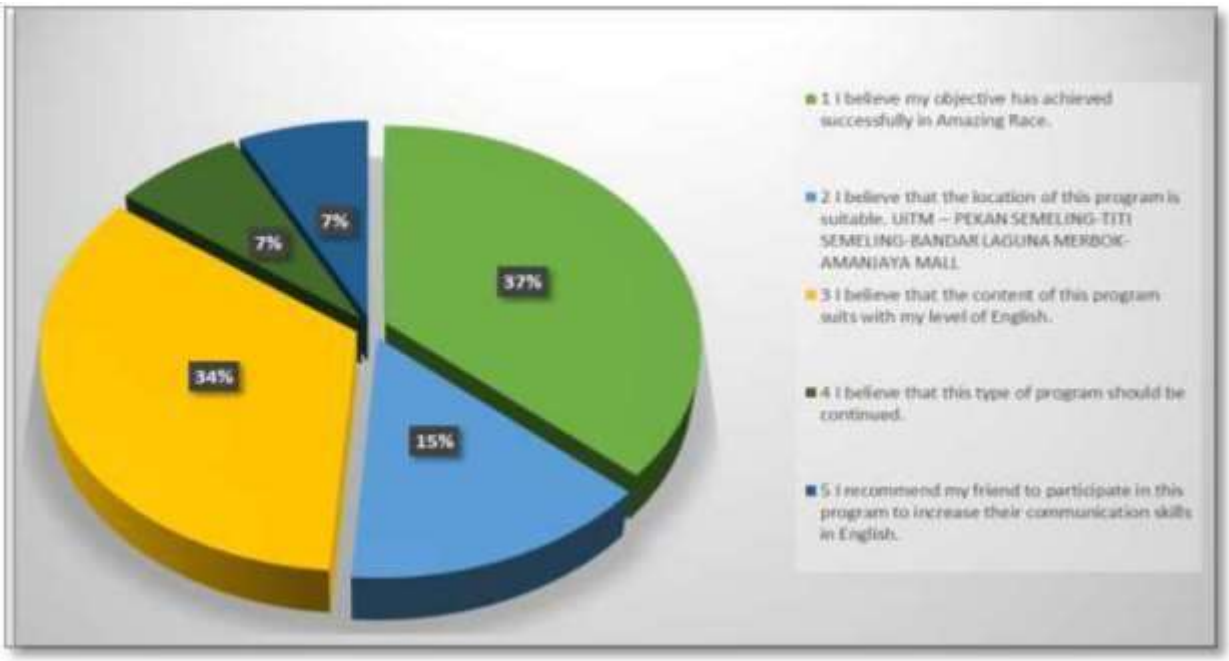


Chart Descriptive Results on Amazing Race 6: Comments on Amazing Race

Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestion for Future Research

Majority of the respondents have indicated a positive response about the introduction of innovative teaching and learning the English language. Despite their social background and inferior feelings of learning English, the respondents in this study managed to fulfil all the tasks given successfully. Also, the program managed to inject few soft skills required by the students such as communication, information seeking and oral presentation in an indirect learning experience manner. The learning experience has given an insightful meaning as they depended heavily on their soft skills to operate as a team. As they moved on to the next tasks, it is impressive to observe the students still stayed engaged, had fun and acquired more self- confidence. Unlike in a traditional classroom, soft skills and language learning were less demonstrated.
Future research may apply similar module of Amazing Race to students at different levels of the programme such as the Diploma or Bachelor degree. The usual caveats of survey research are applicable, such as the inability to probe responses and the responses depending on the respondents'

Motivation and honesty. In the long run, these students would become highly-skilled graduates who can satisfy the demands and needs of the future workplace. Also, the small number of respondents may affect the generalization of theresults.

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